

PAINTERS AND SCULPTORS,

EXPRESSIONIST UTOPIAS

Paradise, Metropolis, Architectural Fantasy

break through the barriers

OCTOBER 21, 1993–JANUARY 16, 1994

to architecture and become

ROBERT O. ANDERSON BUILDING
Plaza level

fellow builders,

LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART

fellow strugglers

for the final goal of art:

the creative conception of the

cathedral of the future,

which will once again be

all in

one

**shape, architecture and
sculpture and painting.**

Excerpt from Walter Gropius,
"New Ideas on Architecture" (1919)

Expressionist

Paradise, Metropolis, Architectural Fantasy



METROPOLIS

In the early 1920s the Expressionists continued to search for paradise, shifting their focus from the natural world to the urban. The city was perceived as a "second

nature," possessing its own dynamic beauty and offering the hope of a consciously constructed utopia. Berlin, its unchecked modernization evoking both awe and revulsion, was the center of artistic activity. In this section artists' responses range from a glorification of the city to a criticism of its dehumanizing aspects.

Ludwig Meisner (Germany, 1884-1966), *Warmer Bahnhof (Warmer train station)*, 1923, black ink heightened with white, 18 1/2 x 13 1/2 in., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Robert Gore Rifkind Center for German Expressionist Studies

PARADISE

This section examines one of the central concerns of the Expressionists before World War I: the relationship of humanity to the natural world. Artists of the *Brücke* (Bridge) and *Blauer Reiter* (Blue rider) groups looked to the landscape to find paradise on earth. Imagery in this section includes Adam and Eve before the fall, the nude in the landscape, the presence of a spiritual power throughout all of nature, and the abstraction of nature's forms to better depict its elemental forces.

Franz Marc (Germany, 1880-1916), *Vermählung (Reconciliation)*, 1903, woodcut, 7 7/8 x 10 7/8 in., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, given anonymously



This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and made possible by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Harry and Yvonne Lenart Charitable Foundation, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

In 1516 Sir Thomas More coined the term utopia

to name an imaginary island with a perfect society. Derived from the Greek and meaning "no place," the word also suggests *eutopia*, "a good place." Utopia, perfect but unrealized, exists as an idea in every culture, arising out of shared aspirations for the future. In Germany during the tumultuous World War I era, utopian ideals sustained artists and architects in their belief that art has the power to shape a better world.

Expressionist Utopias: Paradise, Metropolis, Architectural Fantasy, an exhibition including works by artists Max Beckmann, Hannah Höch, Wassily Kandinsky, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Paul Klee, and Franz

Marc and architects Hermann Finsterlin, Walter Gropius, Wenzel Hablik, Carl Krayl, Hans Scharoun, and Bruno Taut, to name but a few, traces the Expressionists' transition from a belief in a natural paradise to the promise of a man-made utopia. In their future world, art academies would be abandoned, theaters nationalized, and the various arts united within the discipline of architecture. Living harmoniously together, artists and workers would inhabit structures designed to elevate the human spirit. Imagery ranged from ideal agrarian communities and urban fantasies by the utopian architects to the mechanized world of the Dadaists and Bauhaus artists.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s artists and architects from all over Germany banded together in Berlin in several groups such as the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* (Working council for art) and the *Gläserne Kette* (Crystal chain). These groups energetically debated and attempted to realize compelling ideals hitherto regarded as utopian. For the

architects, however, postwar economic conditions made actual construction of buildings all but impossible. Fantastic structures were confined to paper in preparation for the future. In 1929 architect Walter Gropius wrote confidently of their hopes for a new world: "Architects, sculptors, painters, build in imagination, unconcerned about technical difficulties. The boon of imagination is always more important than all technique, which always adapts itself to man's creative will."

The exhibition, consisting of drawings, collages, prints, and watercolors as well as three-dimensional architectural models, is divided into five sections: Paradise, Metropolis, Architectural Fantasy, Anti-Utopia, and Film and Stage. The map on the opposite page provides the overall layout of the exhibition and an introduction to each theme. The installation has been designed by the firm of Coop Himmelblau, whose architects have sought to create a space that reflects the spirit of the German utopian vision through use of dynamic line, unexpected angles, and a combination of materials, including metal, concrete, glass, and light.



ARCHITECTURAL FANTASY

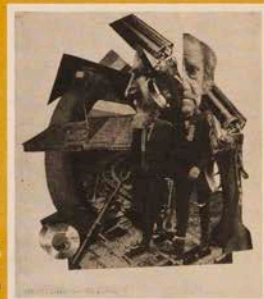
The drawings, architectural models, letters, and manifestos of architects belonging to the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* (Working council for art) and the *Gläserne Kette* (Crystal chain) are presented in this section. Anthropomorphic and crystalline forms abound in their visionary drawings. Whimsical to the point of impracticality in their day, these designs nonetheless paved the way for vitality and invention in modern architecture.

Leonor Trempers (United States, 1871-1961), *Kathedrale (Cathedral)*, 1920, woodcut, 10 x 7 1/2 in., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Robert Gore Rifkind Center for German Expressionist Studies, purchased with funds provided by Anne Ring Arnold, Museum Acquisitions Fund, and deaccession funds



ANTI-UTOPIA

The idea of utopia contains the possibility of anti-utopia, or the dream turned to nightmare. In the early



FILM AND STAGE

Avant-garde film and stage designers made use of the abstract forms and psychologically charged lines of Expressionist painting and printmaking.

This section presents utopian film and stage designs ranging from film sets to examples of the Bauhaus *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art)

combining sound, color, and light. Fittingly, it was in the make-believe world of film and stage that many utopian architectural fantasies were realized.

Ernst Klotz (Germany, 1862-1952), *Marmelade-Turm (Marmalade Tower of Babel)*, set design for the film *Metropolis*, 1926, oil on board, 17 1/2 x 11 1/2 in., Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin

Related Events

Programs are free to museum members and included in the admission price for all others, except where noted. Programs are subject to change without notice. For additional information call (213) 857-6139.

PROGRAMS IN THE GALLERIES

Docent Tours

Docent-guided tours of the exhibition begin at 12 noon on Thursdays and Saturdays from October 21 through December 30.

Curator's Walk-through

Wednesday, November 17, 9:30 A.M.

This informal talk by Timothy Benson, curator of the exhibition, is open only to museum members. The talk is limited to fifty people; reservations must be made by calling (213) 857-6141. The Wilshire Boulevard entrance to the museum will be open at 9:25 A.M., and the walk-through will begin in the plaza level foyer of the Robert O. Anderson Building.

A slide presentation runs continuously in the installation.

Text prepared by the Education Department,
Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

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PROGRAMS IN THE LEO S. BING THEATER

Lectures

Thursday, October 21, 8 P.M.

As part of the series *Masters of Modern Architecture: Lectures by World Renowned Architects*, Wolf D. Prix, principal architect of Coop Himmelblau, will discuss the firm's body of work, including the installation designs for *Expressionist Utopias: Paradise, Metropolis, Architectural Fantasy* and *John Heartfield*. Tickets are \$12.50 for museum members, members of the AIA, seniors, and students with ID; \$15 general admission. For more information call the museum box office at (213) 857-6010.

Sunday, November 14, 1 P.M.

German Expressionism: Fantastic Visions and Real Buildings for a New Society, John Zukowsky, curator of architecture, the Art Institute of Chicago

This lecture is funded in part by a grant from the Goethe Institute-German Cultural Center.

Symposium

Saturday, November 20, 9 A.M. to 5 P.M.

Utopias Reappraised

The morning speakers, including scholars in the fields of art history, architecture, and literature, address the historical phenomenon of utopia and the purpose it served to a generation of artists, literati, and political activists. The afternoon speakers, including architects and cultural historians, discuss the value of utopias today. No reservations are necessary; seating is on a first-come first-served basis.

Films

Thursday, November 4

7:30 P.M.: *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari* (The cabinet of Dr. Caligari) (Robert Wiene, 1919, 72 minutes, b/w, silent)
9 P.M.: *Genuine* (Robert Wiene, 1920, 71 minutes, b/w, silent)

Saturday, November 13

2:30 P.M.: *Rhythmus 21* and *Rhythmus 23* (Rhythm 21 and Rhythm 23) (Hans Richter, 1921 and 1923, 5 minutes total, b/w, music); *Symphonie Diagonale* (Diagonal symphony) (Viking Eggeling, 1924, 2 minutes, b/w, silent); *Der Golem* (The golem) (Paul Wegener, 1920, 95 minutes, b/w, silent)
4:30 P.M.: *Berlin, Die Sinfonie der Grosstadt* (Berlin: symphony of a great city) (Walter Ruttmann, 1927, 53 minutes, b/w, silent)

Thursday, December 2

7:30 P.M.: *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927, 135 minutes, b/w, silent)

Tickets are \$4 for museum members, seniors, and students with valid ID; \$6 general admission. Tickets can be purchased in advance or on the day of the event at the museum box office.

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Return application to the membership and information desk on the Times Mirror Central Court or mail to: Membership Office, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90036.

For information on other levels of membership contact the Membership Office at (213) 857-6151.